

*The Qualifications and Advantages of  
Religious Trust in Times of Danger.*

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# S E R M O N

Preached before the

MAYOR AND CORPORATION,

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St. *Martin's* in OXFORD,

On Friday, February 11. 1757.

Being the Day appointed by Royal Proclamation  
to be kept as a General F A S T.

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Fellow of *Queen's* College.

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## 2 CHRON. XIII. 18.

— *And the Children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD GOD of their Fathers.*

**A**MONG the various Duties belonging to Man, there is none more obvious or more interesting, than that of Trust and Reliance on the supreme Being. This is daily suggested to him, as well by his own Wants, which the World, he finds, is in many Cases unable, in more indisposed, to supply; as by those great Attributes of Wisdom, Goodness and Power in the Almighty, which render Him adequate to all his Desires, and of Course the only proper Object of his Confidence. Accordingly Mankind, we are sure, became early acquainted with this Duty; since Religion, whose Antiquity is equal to that of our Species, is all built, however different in Form, on this common Foundation, a Sense of Men's Wants, and a Belief that God is able and willing to relieve them.

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And if Men in their private Capacities are bound to this Trust, the Duty is at least equally incumbent on public Communities. These have Wants to be supplied, Invasions and Attacks to be guarded against, as well as Individuals. And, as they are less inclined to assist one another, and ungrateful, encroaching, and treacherous, to a Degree not ordinarily known among private Persons; their more immediate, if not sole, Dependence seems to be upon Heaven. They too may with greater Certainty presume, from the visible Course of Providence, that this their Trust will be rewarded with a correspondent Measure of temporal Success. For though a good Man, who hath always firmly adhered to this Duty, can never finally be disappointed, yet does his Condition in this Life seldom hold that even Pace with his Virtues, which is seen in the Prosperity of States and Kingdoms. Among *these*, Rewards are dealt out, for the present, with a more equal Hand; whilst Man is reserved for *his* just Portion of Happiness to an After-state; where Nations, which here afford the noblest Theatre for the Manifestations of Providence, as such shall be no more.

Agreeable to this were, all along, the Dealings of God with His own People the *Jews*; amongst whom many a good Man was suffered

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to lead a Life of Disappointment and Trouble, whilst the State was always happy and flourishing in Proportion to its more steady Reliance on the true God, in Opposition to Idols. Nor were its Deliverances less remarkable, when, after any temporary Departure from it, they returned to this Duty. We have a memorable Instance of this in that Passage of sacred History, from whence the Text is taken. The *Jews* are there described as at War with a neighbouring State, which being greatly their Superior in Strength and Numbers, had threatened to over-run and destroy them. But notwithstanding that the Probability of Success was thus visibly against them, we are told they utterly subdued and brought under the Enemy at that Time. The principal Cause of which Victory, as the inspired Penman assures us, was their *relying on the LORD GOD of their Fathers*, who through all Ages, upon their returning to Him, had given them such signal Proofs of His Mercy.

This Instance of Success and Deliverance affords great Encouragement to other Nations, engaged in the like Circumstances of Danger. For though the *Jews* were under a particular Providence, yet is there Nothing in this single Example, or numberless others of the same Kind recorded in their History, which may not con-

list with the Expectations of any other People: No righteous State having ever been totally oppressed, nor any wicked one suffered to flourish, unless for a while to scourge or cut off some other Nation more abandoned and wicked than itself.

Since then the Success of a People, especially at War, bears in general so exact a Proportion to their Affiance in GOD, whatever tends to awaken in us a Sense of this Duty, will also best qualify us to answer the pious Design of our present Assembling: Which is to implore Almighty GOD for a Blessing on the Arms of our Sovereign, and that He would restore and perpetuate Peace, Safety and Prosperity to these Kingdoms.

To excite in our Hearts therefore this divine Confidence, let us consider

- I. First, the immediate and pressing Calls we have to this Duty.
- II. Secondly, the Conditions requisite on our Part in Order to render it effectual.
- III. Thirdly, the Advantages naturally arising from a due Discharge of it. And
  - i. As to the immediate and pressing Calls we have to this Duty. By saying *immediate* and *pressing*

*sing* I would not be understood to suppose this a Duty, from which a Nation can ever be exempt; since its Dependence, in every Condition, must be still upon God: But only that Prudence requires we should be most attentive thereto, when, humanly speaking, the divine Assistance is most immediately wanted. And this we shall always imagine it to be in Times of Distress: Though even Prosperity itself, how settled soever it may appear, we know cannot long be maintained without it.

Admitting this for a Rule then, we shall see more than ordinary Cause at this Time to apply ourselves to the Duty before us. For with Sorrow it must be acknowledged, that the present Situation of our Affairs hath an alarming Appearance. We are engaged in War with an enraged and ambitious Enemy, that, for Strength and Numbers, hath long been the Terror of *Europe*. And though the War did but lately commence, we have already suffered some heavy, and, it is to be feared, irretrievable Losses; and in a Manner so shameful, because with so fair a Prospect of Success on our Side, as makes them stick like Arrows in the Heart of every Lover of his Country. What new Encroachments too, accompanied with the blackest Circumstances of savage Cruelty and Murder, are every  
Day



Day made on our valuable Colonies : where, as was said of *Israel*, in the last Decline of their State, we *begin to be cut short*, and the Enemy *hath smitten us in all our Coasts* ! These Misfortunes have been followed by what will ever be the Fate of falling Kingdoms as well as Men, the Desertion of Allies and Friends : The Sense of which must sting us the deeper, as some of them perhaps could never have been worth courting by the Enemy, had it not been for the Importance, which our own Blood and Treasures procured them. Thus left in a manner single to cope with the potent Adversary, we have in the mean while great Difficulties to struggle with at Home. The Nation is exhausted of its public Wealth, loaded with enormous Incumbrances, and perplexed with such an annual Increase of Expences, that Invention is racked to find Expedients how to supply them. In a Word our present and late Wars, from which scarce Time hath been allowed us to breathe, have so wasted our Strength and vital Substance, that we are ready to conclude, every new Effort, like the Struggles of a dying Man, to be our last. But what betrays the strongest Symptoms of a State being devoted to Ruin ; not even these Dangers are sufficient to unite our divided Councils ; but Men suffer, we fear, the Passions of  
Ambition

Ambition and private Resentment to prevail over their juster Regards for the Honour, the Interests, and the Safety of their Country. For Pilots to quarrel during the Rage of a Storm or when their Vessel is within the Reach of the Enemy, does not equal this fatal Infatuation.

It is painful to dwell on the Miseries of our Country, otherwise we might add to these Evils, which Heaven in Wrath is pleased to inflict on us, the Scarcity of Bread which now so sorely oppresses our numberless Poor; the Malady that threatens our Flocks with almost total Destruction; the fatal Distemper which hath many Years raged with such Violence amongst our Herds, where perhaps it may be still lurking not yet wholly subdued. In Fine, there are few Calamities incident to a Nation, which our own at present does not in some Measure feel: so that many among us are ready to cry out with the Servants of *Pharaoh*: "*Knowest Thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?*"

This is not said to dismay or discourage us, much less to aggravate our Sufferings; but only to awaken us to a Sense of our Condition, and make us in Earnest apply for a Remedy. For although our Case be deplorable, we trust, it is not yet desperate. The same good Being who hath often so wonderfully interposed in behalf of  
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this Nation, can yet save it from Ruin. If He can but once be engaged to come in to our Assistance, every deadly Symptom will soon disappear, and the State, however weak and reduced at present, be forthwith restored to its wonted Health and Vigour.

It is to Him then we must sue for Help, as the only Power that is able to recover us out of this our distressed and broken Condition. A Measure, one would hope, which, under these Circumstances, we should easily be induced to pursue; since it is natural to rest upon God in Times of Affliction, and would be putting a Kind of Restraint on the Mind, unless utterly abandoned and desperate, not then to flee to this Duty. But though a timely Application to Heaven be the first Step towards a Recovery, we must not hope for this salutary Effect from it, except some others be taken to compleat the Cure. Let us therefore consider

II. Secondly, the Conditions requisite on our Part in Order to render this Duty effectual.

And our first Care should be, that the Cause wherein we are engaged, and rely on God for Success, be just. Otherwise, to apply to Him for Assistance would be as impious, as for a Man in his private Capacity to implore the divine Being to abet



abet his Designs of Oppression, Fraud, Revenge, Lust, or any other Mischief. How far we are right in this Point, the Generality cannot so properly judge, nor does it regularly come under their Determination. But by what can be gathered from the most authentic Accounts, it appears, we were far from being the first in attempting to annoy or encroach upon the Enemy. Nor are Assurances wanting from the highest Authority to convince us, that War was commenced with no other View, but that of maintaining the lawful Rights of our Sovereign and his People. There are several concurrent Circumstances to confirm this Opinion: Such as the Nation's being unlikely to kindle up a War under its present Incumbrances; the little or no Advantages we could propose to reap from new Acquisitions; our natural Fondness for Ease in the quiet Enjoyment of what we already possess, without molesting others; and the Madness it would be to provoke without Cause an Adversary, the Reverse of ourselves in most of these Particulars. In short, should a Contest arise between a restless, overgrown, ambitious Man, and his honest, peaceable, perhaps indolent, Neighbour, would any One be at a Loss on which Side to fix the Blame, though unacquainted with the Grounds of their Quarrel? The Case is the same betwixt us and

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the Enemy. So far then as the Justice of our Cause is concerned, we may fairly presume ourselves intitled to the Favour of Providence.

But this Condition, however necessary, is not sufficient alone, upon which to ground our Hopes of Assistance. For God may suffer us to be oppressed in a just Cause, by Way of Punishment, if in other Points we are found to be wanting: especially in those essential ones of national Piety and Virtue. I am sensible, it is counted but a Form of Speech, when Men complain of the Wickedness of the Times. But surely there are some Sins in which it may be affirmed, without Exaggeration or peevish Invective, that we exceed the Example of former Ages. I do not instance so much in those of Fraud, Luxury, Intemperance and other Immoralities; because even in these, it is possible, we may have been equalled in some other Age; as in those which bear an immediate Relation to God, and are therefore the more provoking; such as a Disregard of Providence, a Disbelief of all Revelation, and an utter Contempt for every Thing serious: Impieties in which the present Age hath risen to such a Pitch, as cannot, in Imagination, well be exceeded. And, which adds greatly to the national Guilt, these have been openly professed and industriously propagated  
both

both at Home and abroad, almost without Control or Discouragement, farther than what hath been given them by good Men in their incomparable Writings. This hath been followed by Consequences extremely pernicious to the State; as they have robbed Men of every good and generous Principle; left them destitute of Virtue and public Spirit; and abandoned them to such Venality and Prostitution on all Sides, such Corruption of Manners and desperate Wickedness, as no Nation hath ever yet been able long to support itself under. Fair Return this for the many invaluable Privileges and Advantages of Wealth, Liberty, pure Religion, and excellent Form of Government, by which we have been eminently distinguished, above most other Nations! Whether these horrid Impieties and Corruptions may not, by the just Judgment of Heaven and their own natural Tendency, now overwhelm this Kingdom with Ruin, or at least sink it into an insignificant tributary Province, God only knows. But they seem the more ominous, since Historians represent our Country as fallen into a like State of Degeneracy, when a Conquest was gained over it, many Centuries ago, by a Part of the same enraged Power, that now threatens it with Destruction.



But, all melancholy Forebodings apart: should the impending Ruin be averted; can we hope however that our wasted Strength and Vigour will be restored, whilst we remain under all the Disqualifications for divine Mercy that have here been recounted? A bare temporary Reliance on God, supposing it consistent with a State of Vice and Impenitence, can no more do this, than the best Medicine can recover a broken Constitution, while the Man perseveres in the same Course of Riot and Intemperance, by which it was at first impaired. The Way to render this Trust effectual to the Purpose intended is, by abandoning the Principles of Libertinism, Irreligion and Profaneness, for which the Land mourns; by bewailing the enormous Corruptions they have introduced; and then proving the Sincerity of our Sorrow by wholly forsaking them, and in earnest returning to the ancient Paths of manly Piety and Virtue, from which we have so unhappily deviated.

These are the Conditions principally to be depended on. And if this Day's Solemnity be accompanied with Resolutions of faithfully discharging them, our Addresses to Heaven may not yet ascend too late. The united fervent Prayers of a whole People, humbled under a Sense of their Sins, and vowing Amendment,  
have

have seldom failed of Acceptance. These are what the Father of Mercies, according to the Representations given of Him in Scripture, cannot easily withstand or refuse. Who knows then but that, in Compliance with the Prayers at this Time ascending from all Quarters of the Nation, even now the divine Decree may be passed, the heavenly Mandate issued out, that henceforth our Affairs should take a more favourable Turn, our Arms be blessed with Success, and these Kingdoms, with the pure and reformed Religion which so happily adorns them, be again crowned with the Blessings of Prosperity and Peace. It was this Kind of Humiliation which obtained that welcome Message from GOD to *Hezekiah*, when *Sennacherib*, after laying waste many fenced Cities into ruinous Heaps, threatened *Jerusalem* with a like Destruction: *Thus saith the LORD concerning the King of Assyria, he shall not come into this City, nor shoot an Arrow there, nor come before it with Shields, nor cast a Bank against it. — For I will defend this City to save it, for my own Sake, and for my Servant David's Sake.*

But then lastly, we are not so far to rely on the divine Aid as to slacken and abate, much

a Isa. 37. 33—35.

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less to give over, our own Endeavours. For though the Issues of War are immediately in the Hands of God, and do of all others least answer the Probability of second Causes, yet is not the Application of our own Powers therefore to be neglected; since these are the established Means whereby Heaven conveys to us Success in every Undertaking; though, to teach us Dependence, it reserves to itself a Power to cross and disappoint them. Nay so necessary a Condition is this, that even where Miracles have been interposed in Relief of a distressed People, God hath seldom taken their Cause so wholly upon Himself, as to suffer them to stand amazed in the midst of Danger, only lifting up their Hands to Heaven, without trying any other Means of Deliverance. Thus *Moses*, whilst the *Egyptians* were closely pursuing the *Israelites*, is sharply questioned by God for not seconding his Prayers for their Escape by the Use of such Helps towards it as they had in their Power: \* *Wherefore criest Thou unto me? Speak unto the Children of Israel that they go forward.* The Truth is, without a vigorous Application of our own Strength, we shall be more likely to provoke God, than to engage His Assistance; as there are no Persons we have less Patience with, or help with greater Reluctance,

a Exod. 14. 15.



than those, who, throwing all their Concerns upon us, are too timid, or too lazy and indolent, to do any Thing for themselves.

Since then the divine Assistance will not readily be vouchsafed but in Concurrence with our own Endeavours, it very much imports us not to be slack or remiss in exerting them; but to contribute every one his Share towards the common Safety. And this is an End of which Men in all Stations may be some Way or other Promoters. Our Superiors may advance it by the Vigour, the Wisdom, and the Unanimity of their Counsels: our Fleets and Armies by the Vigilance, the Promptitude, and the Bravery of their Conduct: and all of us by paying a dutiful Submission to our Superiors, by our cheerful Contributions to strengthen the Hands of Government in carrying on the War, by inspiring and animating one another with a Love of our Country in this Time of common Danger, and by allaying the Violence of Party, reconciling the Minds of Fellow-Subjects, and removing, as far as in us lies, every Obstruction to the public Good. Such honest Endeavours on our Part will at once incline Heaven to cooperate with us, and prove the best Means, in a natural Way, to extricate us out of our present Difficulties.

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Nor, in this view, should the Assistance of Allies, if any yet remain whose Fidelity and Steadiness we may with Security rely on, be neglected. For Nations stand in the same Relation to one another as Men; and may be applied to for Aid with as little Shadow of Distrust in Providence, as a prudent Man depends on the Kindness of a Friend, the good Offices of a Neighbour, or the Interest of a Patron.

But then in prosecuting these or any other human Means for our Safety, we are not so far to rely on their Efficacy, as to imagine the divine Concurrence needless. This is an Error more to be avoided, even than that of trusting to Heaven for Deliverance without moving a Finger towards it ourselves; since the one does but argue a religious Weakness, but the other an impious Presumption. Nor could we consult worse for the Success of our Affairs, than by running into this Extreme; the supreme Disposer of Events being too jealous of his Prerogative, to suffer any Events to prosper, how well soever planned, in which His Providence is allowed to have no Share. How highly guilty we are of this imprudent as well as impious Measure, let any one judge, who reflects on the Writings, the Conversation, and the general Bent of the Times. And no doubt to this Cause, among others,  
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may be referred the many strange and unexpected Disappointments we have suffered, during the short Progress of the present War. Had we confided less in our own Strength, and made more Account of the Assistance of God, looking for Success on our Endeavours only through Him; We may reasonably presume, we had not so fatally experienced, how vain and insignificant the most pompous Preparations, and the best concerted Schemes of Defence are, without His favourable Concurrence and Blessing.

Upon the whole then, to conduct ourselves rightly between these two Extremes, we should apply all the lawful Means we are able, to promote our Success; and with the same Vigour and Earnestness, as if they were our only Reliance: And then again so intirely commit the Event to God, under an humble Sense of its being solely in His Disposal, as if we ourselves, in the mean While, had only sat still. Such a due Mixture of honest Industry and devout Resignation, is, what alone suits the Condition of active, dependent Beings. #

Let us now therefore proceed, as was proposed;

III. Thirdly, to consider the Advantages naturally arising from a due Discharge of this Duty.

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And the first Advantage is, that it gives a Boldness to Men's Undertakings, and Resolution to go through them with Undauntedness and Vigour. A Man acting under the Eye only of a Patron and Well-wisher to his Cause, will exert himself almost beyond his natural Abilities: How much more He that believes himself under the Inspection, the Influence, and the Protection of Omnipotence? Accordingly, what wonderful Atchievements have been performed, as appears from numberless Instances both in sacred and profane History, by Men animated with this Persuasion? It was therefore a very politic Proceeding in *Rabshakeh*, the *Assyrian* General, when he came before *Jerusalem*, to assure the Inhabitants in the Hearing of his own Army, that GOD had withdrawn His Protection from them, and now fought on the Side of their Enemies: *"Am I now come up without the LORD against this Place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, go up against this Land and destroy it.* A general Belief of this, he knew, would at once so dishearten the *Jews*, and in Proportion add Courage to his own Forces, that it must be followed either by an immediate Surrender, or an easy Conquest of the City.

a 2 Kings 18. 25.

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This is not said to encourage the spiriting up an Army with false Hopes, which no good Man would advise, though often practised with Success; but to shew that Religion, however foreign it may be thought, is not the least useful Quality, to Men of this Profession. We cannot deny indeed, but that Emulation, a Sense of Honour, Love of Country, or perhaps a mere Insensibility of Danger, may make Men acquit themselves well in the Day of Battle. But it is certain that not one or all of these can infuse that steady, uniform, exalted Courage, that heroic Ardour, which a rational well-grounded Trust in God inspires. Without this, constitutional Valour is a variable unsettled Thing, always liable to be disconcerted, and subject to the same Sinkings and Decays as the Constitution itself. How highly then does it behove Men bred up to Arms, among other Attainments suitable to their Profession, to provide themselves with this religious Confidence? Not all their Address and Skill in War would stand them in half so much Stead in the Hour of Trial, as this. It would give Strength and Vigour to their Arms, and *fight for them against their Enemies better than a mighty Shield and strong Spear.*

A State too would do well, for its own Sake, to see them trained up to this Duty. We might then safely trust the Defence of our Rights in their Hands. Men, who had Minds thus seasoned with Religion, would think themselves bound upon Principle to do their utmost in vindication of the Wrongs offered to their King and Country. Besides, if we may be allowed to judge of our heavenly Preserver from what we feel in ourselves, no doubt but He would be more ready to bless the Endeavours of such Men, and to make His Work prosper in their Hands; there being no Persons we help with greater Pleasure, or more unwillingly disappoint, than those who put themselves wholly under our Protection. Whereas, if a Soldiery be profane and dissolute, utterly regardless of a Providence, and profligate and abandoned to the last Degree; is any hearty Confidence to be reposed in them? or can it be imagined that Heaven, though otherwise not unfavourably disposed towards a Nation, would be concerned with such vile Instruments in procuring its Safety?

Nor, in the mean while, is this divine Virtue of less Efficacy to comfort and support the Minds of a People at Home, than to derive the Blessings of Courage and Success upon their Armies



mies in the Field. For consider it only in Times of Danger, when the Affairs of a Nation wear a melancholy Aspect, when all Things look dark and lowering, and perhaps every Day threatens some overwhelming Ruin : how does this divine Confidence help to settle and compose Men's Minds, and to quiet those Apprehensions and Tremblings of Heart, which they would otherwise feel ? *The Righteous will not be afraid of any evil Tidings : for his Heart standeth fast and believeth in the LORD.* He knows that all Events are in the Hands of a merciful God, and is therefore inclined to look for more prosperous Times, rather than give Way to any gloomy Presages of his Country's Ruin. But and if the Danger be too pressing to admit of Hopes of Deliverance, He has this Comfort however, that his highest Interests are still safe, being placed above the Reach of human Contingencies, where no Power on Earth, however great and victorious, can invade or hurt them. Your own Reflections will spare me the Pains of observing, how much we stand in Need, under our present Alarms and Distractions, of every Support and Consolation, which this Principle is naturally fitted to bestow.

And if we apply it as a Remedy for the Evils we suffer, as well as those we apprehend, it will  
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 be found of equal Benefit to us. It is true, we have met with some heavy Disasters, proved hitherto unsuccessful in all our Undertakings, and are mightily sunk in Point of Reputation amongst our Neighbours. But then are there here no alleviating Circumstances to be discovered by Virtue of this Trust? Shall we not reflect that these Misfortunes have yet but affected the Extremities as it were, and although galling enough, might however have fallen upon some more tender and vital Part? That as they are sent by One, *who doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men*, they must be designed for some gracious End: perhaps to check our Pride, and correct that over-weening Opinion, which we are apt to entertain of our matchless Strength and Valour: perhaps to caution us against any future Delays or Negligence; that by stumbling at the Threshold as it were, we might avoid some greater Danger: or lastly, to chastise us for our Sins, and bring us back to our Duty. In a Word, inspired by this Trust we shall resolve every Calamity we suffer, either into a Mercy on God's Part, or some Demerit on our own, and by that Means be either Way Gainers by it.

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The last Advantage I shall mention, is, that besides setting our present Circumstances in the most

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most favourable Light they will bear, it will incline us to *tarry the LORD's Leisure* for a Removal of them, and not suffer us peevishly to conclude, that because our Requests on this Head are not immediately complied with, they are therefore totally rejected. We shall consider that he may for a while, out of Kindness, forbear to grant them: either for a Trial of our Virtue, or to heighten and inflame our Devotion; and, by enhancing the Value of His Blessings, to make us receive them at last with the greater Transports of Joy and Gratitude.

Who then would not labour to provide themselves with this great Secret of Happiness; which can thus blunt the Edge of Disappointments, and, by giving a new Turn to the Mind, convert the severest Dispensations of Providence to a People into real Blessings? The Way to obtain this is, by meditating on the great Deliverances which God hath in former Ages vouchsafed to this Church and Nation; by frequent Prayer, which being a repeated Act of Affiance in Him, will be a Means of rendering this Duty habitual; and by studying, whilst the Mind is rendered thus soft and pliant through sufferings, and naturally bends towards God, to fix it in this Direction.

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This done, our ultimate Care must be, each of us so to demean himself, that he be no Hindrance, by any Failure on his Part, to the public Blessings we hope to receive. We may indeed and ought to bewail the Sins of the Community; but then our own must not be forgotten or over looked in the Heap. Every Man must consider the Part he may have had in drawing down the Judgements of God upon the Land, and make that the chief Subject of his Humiliation. Would but each of us thus draw off his own Share of the public Guilt, the whole would soon be exhausted. This is a Way in which the meanest have it in their Power to serve their Country, and be this their Encouragement, that the highest cannot serve it in a better. Let the first Object of our Aim therefore be *personal* Amendment: so from this small Beginning in Particulars will a general Reformation arise. We shall then have Nothing to fear from our Enemies; but may rest secure on that most encouraging and gracious of all Promises, given by God to *Joshua* when he went forth to War: *\* I will be with Thee, I will not fail Thee nor forsake Thee. Be strong, therefore, and of a good Courage.*

a Joshua 1. 5, 6.

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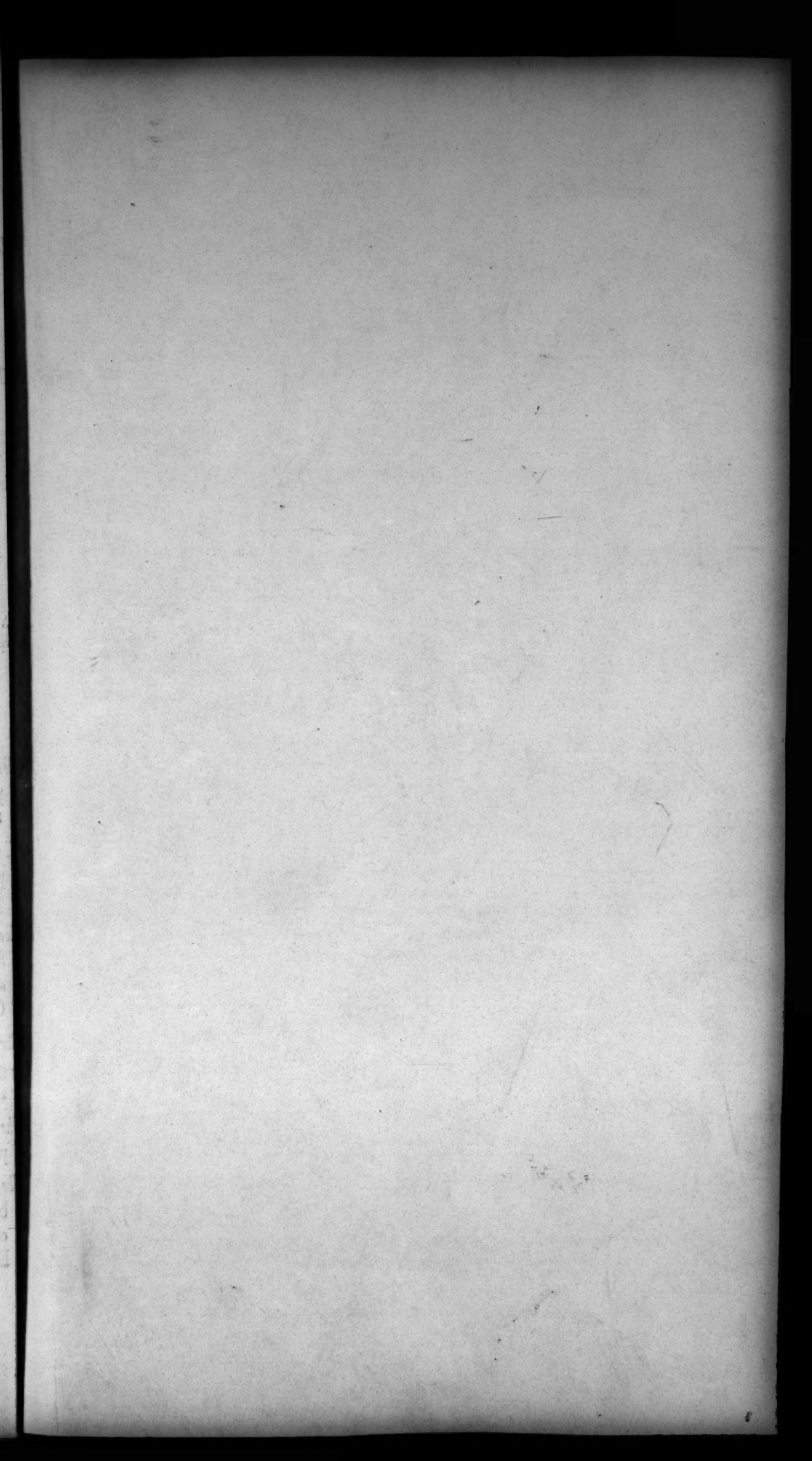
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